

FIRST PARISH CHURCH

By Gershom Bradford

A stranger to Duxbury, coming suddenly upon this church building of imposing proportions, standing deep in its rural surroundings, quite naturally wonders what early prosperity had aided in its construction. And when within he sees the wide auditorium and the massive mahogany pulpit, he realizes that men of parts have walked this way and left a memorial of dignity to their enterprising vigor as well as honoring the source of their strength.

Prosperous

At the time when The First Parish contemplated the erection of its 4th building, Duxbury was a thriving community, devoted almost exclusively to maritime pursuits. On Blue Fish River alone there were 5 shipyards, among which was that of E. Weston & Sons, a world-famous firm. Under the driving force and genius of the father, Ezra Weston II, they were launching the ship "Hope," the largest vessel then in New England. He and his sons belonged to The First Parish and it is easy to assume that the same vision and large scale planning of the Westons was a dominating factor in designing and building this, the largest church in Plymouth County.

The main building is of native pine, wrought by carpenters who had made a reputation in the

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shipping world through the fineness and thoroughness of their work. The construction of the building is an example of excellence. Being 85 feet long by 66 feet wide, with side walls rising upward for 30 feet, it presented a problem to support the great roof. It would have been made quite simple by introducing buttresses or pillars, but our forbears would have none of such architecture. They desired and achieved a clear auditorium.

What Happened?

This desire led to a remarkable system of hidden framing beneath the roof. The expansive walls are tied in by tremendous 9x14 inches through timbers that would otherwise have found their way into the structure of great ships. Upon those great beams were erected the ingenious framing of huge dimensions, that was upheld the roof above the heads of 5 devoted generations, ever since 1840. What a noble grove of ancient pines supplied this important need? And how

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well they served in clearly indicated in that after standing firm against the gales and snows of a hundred years, the building braced itself against unprecedented violence of 2 hurricanes - thus adding further attribute to its builders' workmanship.

On the navigational charts of the coast, our steeple - rising about 127 feet from the ground - is accurately plotted as a prominent landmark, and down through the decades, it has served the mariner who, offshore, has taken, and still is taking his bearings from it.

Within its walls, in earlier days, there was a wealth of romance of the sea. Many a deep-water shipmaster belonged to The First Parish. Their women folks came to church arrayed in fabrics and were adorned with elegancies from the choicest markets of overseas trade. Bronzed faces would appear on Sundays, tanned by 'tropic suns and wrinkled by Cape Horn gales.

In the adjoining cemetery are many stones to those who sailed away never to return.

This was not an ordinary town, nor this a commonplace congregation. Its members were, perhaps more familiar with Canton, Honolulu and the Mediterranean than with Worcester or Springfield. As the visitor learns of this world-wide outlook of the old congregation he readily understands why the design of the circular window in the front gable, below the steeple, uses the meridians and parallels of latitude of the earth globe.

Turning to leave the building by means of the main aisle, the visitor faces a clock above the door, a gift from Ezra Weston, still ticking off the ceaseless hours of time in this seemingly ageless church.